

BODY AND BLOOD
OF CHRIST

YEAR C



Prayer

Psalm 110:1-4

The Lord says to my lord,
“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
your footstool.”

The Lord sends out from
Zion your mighty scepter.
Rule in the midst of your
foes.

Your people will offer
themselves willingly on the
day you lead your forces
on the holy mountains.

From the womb of the
morning, like dew, your
youth will come to you.

The Lord has sworn and
will not change his mind,
“You are a priest forever
according to the order of
Melchizedek.”

Reading the Word

FIRST READING:

Genesis 14:18-20

And King Melchizedek of
Salem brought out bread and
wine; he was priest of God
Most High. He blessed him
and said,

“Blessed be Abram by
God Most High, maker of
heaven and earth;

and blessed be God Most
High, who has delivered
your enemies into your
hand!”

And Abram gave him one-
tenth of everything.

SECOND READING:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord
what I also handed on to you,
that the Lord Jesus on the
night when he was betrayed
took a loaf of bread, and
when he had given thanks, he
broke it and said, “This is my
body that is for you. Do this in
remembrance of me.” In the
same way he took the cup
also, after supper, saying, “This
cup is the new covenant in
my blood. Do this, as often as
you drink it, in remembrance
of me.” For as often as you
eat this bread and drink the
cup, you proclaim the Lord’s
death until he comes.

GOSPEL:

Luke 24:46-53

Jesus went to Bethsaida. When
the crowds found out about
it, they followed him; and he
welcomed them, and spoke
to them about the kingdom

of God, and healed those
who needed to be cured.

The day was drawing to a
close, and the twelve came
to him and said, “Send the
crowd away, so that they
may go into the surround-
ing villages and countryside,
to lodge and get provisions;
for we are here in a deserted
place.”

But he said to them, “You give
them something to eat.” They
said, “We have no more than
five loaves and two fish—
unless we are to go and buy
food for all these people.” For
there were about five thou-
sand men.

And he said to his disciples,
“Make them sit down in
groups of about fifty each.”
They did so and made them
all sit down.

And taking the five loaves
and the two fish, he looked
up to heaven, and blessed
and broke them, and gave
them to the disciples to set
before the crowd. And all ate
and were filled.

What was left over was gath-
ered up, twelve baskets of
broken pieces.

FIRST READING

Genesis 14:18-20

PSALM

Psalm 110:1-4

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

GOSPEL

Luke 9:11-17

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HEARING THE WORD

“Comprehensive Care”

Today's solemnity celebrates the presence of Jesus under the species of bread and wine in the Eucharist. However, this celebration also has a very human and even ordinary aspect. It shows that God's care and concern extend not only to the soul and spiritual life, but also to the human body, and covers the ordinary and daily needs of the faithful.

The first reading presents the conclusion of a story of the four kings who invaded the land where Abram and his nephew, Lot, lived. Successfully defeating the opposition of the local inhabitants, those four kings seized the land and carried off Lot, his household and his properties into captivity (Gen 14:12). Despite the overwhelming power of these four rulers, Abram did not give up on his nephew. Thanks to his personal courage and clever military tactics, Abram defeated the superior enemy, freeing Lot and his family from captivity. The scene from today's reading describes the victorious Abram's homecoming. He received a hero's welcome from the local inhabitants. Among them was a ruler of a local city – Melchizedek of Salem. The name Melchizedek is symbolic. It means “king of righteousness”, while the name of his town, “Salem”, means “peace”. Melchizedek is the righteous king of peace

and also the priest of God the Most High. This is the very first time that a priest is mentioned in the Bible. Melchizedek, a priest representing God, pronounces the first priestly blessing in the Bible. He blesses God the creator for giving Abram victory over his enemies and blesses Abraham for his courage and determination in saving the life and restoring the liberty of Lot and his family. Moreover, Melchizedek welcomed the victorious Abram with the gifts of bread and wine to nourish and refresh the exhausted Abram and his soldiers.

The welcome and the care Melchizedek offered Abram and his companions was comprehensive in its double focus on the body and soul. By blessing Abram and blessing God Melchizedek ensured that Abram properly understood the spiritual foundations of his victory. He was victorious over the enemies because God was with him and God delivered those four kings into Abram's hands. By providing Abram with food and drink Melchizedek catered for the bodily needs of the tired hero. Those gifts of the land, bread and wine, were also the gifts of God meant specifically to sustain and give joy to his servants. Thus, Melchizedek's actions teach that God extends his care over the spirit and over the body of those who do God's will.

In the second reading Paul instructs his troublesome

Christians in Corinth on how to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The background to this instruction is the Corinthians' inappropriate behaviour during the common meals which they held in commemoration of Jesus' last supper. These meals had both a spiritual and a social significance. Spiritually, they were occasions for communal prayer and instruction based on Jesus' passion and resurrection. Socially, these gatherings included an ordinary meal when the members shared food and drink.

However, in the Corinthian community the spiritual aspect of those meals had been lost. Some wealthy members would come early and eat and drink to the point of becoming drunk. Others would come later and find the meal already consumed and the Christian gathering reduced to a drinking party (1 Cor 11:17-22).

In this context Paul writes to the community with a stern reminder that the Christian gathering is a sacred occasion to commemorate Jesus' passion and self-sacrifice. The re-enactment and remembrance of what Jesus did on the cross serves as a proclamation of his death and resurrection. This proclamation is meant to provide the spiritual nourishment for the community as it awaits the return of Jesus at the end of time.

At that time, this sacred meal was either preceded or followed by the sharing of ordi-

nary food. Many members of the community who were poor would benefit from the generosity of the wealthier members, and have a decent meal. However, this social function of the Eucharistic meal must never overshadow its primary, spiritual side. In his instructions Paul seeks to strike a balance between the spiritual nourishment and bodily provision. Each played a role in the life of this early Christian community, and one without the other would be incomplete. Thus, the spiritual care and nourishment should be accompanied by the bodily care, and vice versa.

The Gospel passage contains the Lukan version of the multiplication of the bread and fish by Jesus. This is the only miracle of Jesus reported by all four evangelists with remarkable consistency. A constant feature of these reports is that Jesus provides food for the crowd who came to listen to his teaching. Thus, Jesus combines his teaching meant for instruction and spiritual guidance with the provision of bodily nourishment for his followers. Each of the feeding stories emphasizes two elements. First, Jesus prays and gives thanks to God before the bread and the fish are multiplied. The gift of food is not his own but comes from God, the ultimate source of all nourishment. Second, the actual distribution of food is done by the disciples. They pass on the food provided by

Jesus thanks to God's generosity. Thus, the multiplication of the bread and fish teaches that Jesus' concern and care touches the soul and the body alike. He cares for his followers as a spiritual leader and also a provider of food. He also teaches his disciples that their own leadership style, as future apostles, must include spiritual care combined with concern for the physical well-being of their followers. The book of Acts shows that they learned the lesson. The first communities they led provided material care to their members and were based on the sharing of material goods (cf. Acts 4:32-37).

Today's readings prove beyond a doubt that spiritual and bodily care go hand in hand. Melchizedek, the first priest mentioned in the Bible, blesses Abram and reminds him that God was behind his success. At the same time, he gives Abram food and drink. Paul teaches his Corinthian Christians about the central, spiritual importance of the Eucharistic meal. However, he also reminded them that they ought to share their ordinary food to manifest their care for one another and their unity in the Lord (cf. 1 Cor 11:33). Jesus, despite his utter focus on, and dedication to, the teaching about the Kingdom of God and discipleship, still shows concern for the hungry crowd. He feeds the people with provisions that come from God, and makes the disciples sharers in this process. God's care for the

human race is thus comprehensive and wholistic, involving body and soul. Those of God's servants who understand this and act for the spiritual and bodily welfare or others are like the Israelite king of whom the Psalmist spoke in the words, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Today's solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is certainly a Eucharistic feast. Today we rejoice and give thanks to Jesus for being with us through the gifts of bread and wine, which become his body and blood. How and why Jesus chose to be with us in this manner is a mystery that we approach with utter reverence and admiration. His spiritual but real presence in the Eucharist nourishes our spirits and unites us with him in a unique way.

However, the Eucharist also teaches us about the very bodily and ordinary aspect of Jesus' care for us. We must remember that bread and wine, much like in the first reading, are first of all food and drink for the body. Therefore, as we partake in the Eucharist, we must keep always in mind that it obliges us to act like Melchizedek and Jesus – caring for the soul without neglecting the body. Our care and service within the Christian community must necessarily take into account both the spiritual and material needs. One

without the other is incomplete.

Some Christians treat the Eucharist as if it was a form of magic. They come to Church on Sunday, receive the body and blood of Jesus, and return to their life believing that they are magically fed and protected from all harm. However, the Eucharist is a celebration of a specific event – Jesus’ death on the cross. When celebrating the last supper, Jesus gave the disciples specific instructions to eat the bread and drink the cup “in memory of me”. Thus, he obliged his disciples not only to observe the ritual of the Eucharist, but to imitate what the Eucharistic bread and wine symbolize – his body broken by the whips of the soldiers and his blood spilled on the cross. Jesus underwent this agony for our sake so that we might have life which even death cannot destroy. By leaving his disciples with the command to eat his body and drink his blood Jesus meant that they ought also to put themselves in the self-giving service to others. This is the sense of the Eucharistic celebration that many ignore. When receiving the Eucharistic Jesus, the believer obliges himself or herself to become like Jesus in his service and care for others. Thus, the Eucharist, while leading to the spiritual union with the Lord, must also affect and transform the life of those who enter into this union, so that they become more like Jesus in their actions and words.

While becoming food and drink for our souls, Jesus also became an example and motivation for us to nourish one another in both the spiritual and physical sense. The beauty of authentic Christian faith lies in the combination of the spiritual with the material, and the soul with the body. As long as we live in the flesh, we must care for our bodies. Therefore, today’s feast insists that we seek and protect our bodily dignity. Care for the physical wellbeing of one another, and the search for truly human and dignified conditions of life are therefore as much a Christian concern as is the care for spiritual welfare. We ought to remember this message of today’s feast each time that we receive Jesus’ body and blood in the Eucharist.

Proverb

“An onion shared with a friend tastes like roast lamb.”

Action

Self-examination

Do I care sufficiently for my body? Is my lifestyle a healthy one?

When was the last time I assisted someone materially and showed generosity? What form did it take?

Response to God

In my prayers of thanksgiving and petition I will seek to maintain balance and a twofold focus on the spiritual and material sides of my life.

Response to your World

I will identify someone who needs material assistance and find a way to show my care in any way or manner which I can afford.

What spiritual needs do we have as a group? We will determine one specific way to grow spiritually and implement it.

Prayer

Thank your Lord for the gift of the body in which my soul now resides. Extend your loving care so that I may have health and the material provisions to live my life in dignity and peace. Make me a generous and caring person so that through me your care for each of your children may become manifest. Amen.